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How Uncle John's Omissionary Sunday School Became Commissionary

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HOW UNCLE JOHN'S OMISSIONARY SUNDAY SCHOOL BECAME COMMISSIONARY

PART I

UNCLE JOHN'S OMISSIONARY SUNDAY SCHOOL

YES, that was just the word by which his favorite niece had described the Sunday school of which he—Uncle John—for years had been the widely loved and respected superintendent. What did she mean by “omissionary”? Naturally enough, it hinted at omissions of some sort; were they omissions which ought to be omitted or were they omissions which ought not to be omitted?

Priscilla's visit to her uncle and aunt was nearly at an end; but in all the weeks which she had spent with them she had only occasionally mentioned the school, and then in the most neutral of terms. It was Sunday evening and they were just entering the house upon their return from one of the concerts for which the school was famous, when Uncle John said, half-banteringly, “Well, Priscilla, in all the time you've been here, you've hardly mentioned my hobby, the Sunday school; what do you think of it?” Priscilla had hesitated a moment, and then with smiling lips, but with serious eyes, had replied, “Why, Uncle John, I think it's a splendid school,—that is—I mean—I think it's splendid as an omissionary Sunday school!” And then she had rushed up-stairs to her room before bewildered Uncle John could say a word.

Now, Uncle John's Sunday school was regarded as a model by every one; the teachers' meetings were held

with regularity and with results which told for the good of the school life; the grading was so skilfully arranged that the fortunate pupils could climb the hill of Scriptural knowledge without undue fatigue; the concerts, picnics, indeed all the social occasions of the school proper and of the flourishing Home Department were anticipated with eager pleasure by old and young alike; there was a Baraca Class and a Philathea Class; there was a Cradle Roll of the loveliest babies ever; in short, the school was conducted according to the most approved first-of-the-century methods. Uncle John for the life of him could not see what omission was made of anything desirable, at least. And yet, in connection with the work of which he was in charge and for which he was in a large measure responsible—the work of training young lives for future Christian usefulness—Priscilla had used a word which implied a lack of something. What could it be?

Had he not been so conscientious a man and had he not had so much confidence in his niece's judgment he would have at once dismissed the matter as a piece of youthful nonsense; but Priscilla was a college-bred girl and really had, as Uncle John expressed it, "an uncommon lot of common sense." It must be confessed that of late this opinion had been a little shaken from the fact that she had given up a very lucrative and flattering position as a teacher in order that she might become a missionary. While Uncle John was a firm believer in missionary effort and gave generously towards its support he thought with many other good Christian people that mediocre ability was plenty good enough for the heathen, and he was not slow in emphasizing his conviction that Priscilla's brilliant talents would be wasted in this venture.

In the meantime Priscilla was wondering how she could explain to her uncle just what she meant without

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appearing in the unlovely role of the Younger Person giving points to the Older Person. After much thought she determined to resort to an artifice which she had occasionally used as a coating for moral or philosophical tablets which thereby could be more easily swallowed by her pupils—the writing of little parables for illustrating special lessons.

The next morning she handed her uncle the manuscript inclosed in an envelope upon which was written, “Not to be opened until you are at the office.” Uncle John kissed her and left for his place of business where he read the following:

“Many years ago there lived a physician who devoted his spare time to seeking a remedy for an inevitably fatal disease which every year swept away its hundreds of thousands of victims. But it was not until he was a very old man that his diligent search was rewarded. Thereupon he called unto him certain of his associates and after telling them of his discovery, said, ‘My days are nearly spent and I wish to make you the ambassadors for spreading the glad tidings far and wide. Do not, I entreat you, confine it within the boundaries of our own town, but proclaim it to all peoples and to all places. Perchance, most of you, for sundry reasons will be unable to go to remote localities, but surely there will be those who will gladly go in your stead, the necessary funds to be provided by those who will have received the priceless benefit of this boon to mankind.’

“The good physician soon passed away and his faithful friends began at once to carry out his wishes. Words cannot express the amazement and joy over the wonderful cures which every day were effected. But strange and sad to relate, centuries even crept by and still there were many lands to which the good news had not been sent and where the dread sickness still claimed its thou-

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sands of victims every day. The Administrators in whose hands had been placed the business matters connected with this work found themselves in a most distressing position; for they were obliged to turn deaf ears to the incessant cries for help. Incredible as it may seem, many of the people who had been saved from a horrible death by means of the good old physician's remedy refused to give money for the rescue of others, especially those in distant lands, declaring, if not in words, then by deeds, that they did not believe in this far-away work; that their own homes demanded all their care; they themselves, their relatives and friends had been cured,—why bother about any one else?

"Many were the conferences held for the discussion of this disgraceful problem but with indifferent results, until at last on one of these occasions, a wise leader arose and said, 'My friends, I am convinced that our failure to achieve the highest success is due to our neglect of foundation work; that in all these years, neither we nor our fathers before us have recognized the importance of training the children in this matter. To be sure, we have told them about the remedy, and how they themselves may be cured, but never a word of that part of the good physician's message that it was to be world-wide, and that they who experience its benefits are to be the agents for its bestowal upon others. What wonder, then, that the selfish conception thus gained in the most impressionable period of life should rule in after years? So strongly did this simple truth appeal to the promoters of the work that plans were soon made for implanting within the hearts and lives of the children the principle of unselfishness, which was the real essence of the large-hearted physician's last message. And in even one generation, the wisdom of this course was vividly manifested in the wonderful enlargement of the work.'

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It was not a difficult matter for Uncle John to read in this little parable the story of the Great Commission; full well he knew of the yearly financial struggles of the Board and of the failure of the churches to arise to the opportunities of the whitening harvest fields. But it had not occurred to him that he held in his hands the key to the future success of the work; that in his otherwise model school, the very heart of Christianity was omitted. Uncle John did a deal of hard thinking.

When he met his niece at night, he patted her cheek and said, "Well, little girl, that's a very pretty story you've written for your old uncle! and now I'll recite the lesson I've learned from it,—Omissionary Sunday schools turn out omissionary Christians; omissionary Christians make omissionary churches; and all this makes the Boards omissionary, too!"

PART II

UNCLE JOHN'S COMMISSIONARY SUNDAY SCHOOL

UNCLE JOHN was a man who did not believe in letting his yesterdays spoil his to-days and to-morrows. He began to draw plans for the rebuilding of his former Sunday school ideal, the very foundation of which, he now perceived, was so weak.

"Priscilla," said he at the breakfast table, on the morning after his mastery of the little missionary lesson which his niece had given him, "I wish you'd send to headquarters to-day for marching directions for this missionary work in the Sunday school; it's new business to me, you know, and I want to start it right."

"It will be some time before you have a plan ready to propose to the school, I presume," remarked Aunt Ruth.

"Some time!" echoed Uncle John, smiling indulgently at his little wife; "why, I'm going to begin right off, next Sunday! I've been guilty of the 'Great Omission' long enough,"—here he glanced roguishly at Priscilla as he made this little play on the word which she had used,— "and I've got to 'get busy quick' to make up lost time!"

Aunt Ruth looked at him with mild reproof in her soft eyes; Uncle John was the very best man in the world, of course; but he *would* occasionally use the obnoxious "weeds of rhetoric." "Well, then," he amended, in a serious tone, "I'll use Scripture language: 'The King's business requireth haste;,' and I can't begin too soon to repair as far as possible, the damage I've done to that business!"

The literature having arrived in due season, Uncle John pored over its pages with the deepest interest; pencil in hand, he marked suggestions which seemed adaptable to his school needs, commenting now and then on what he read in his characteristic manner.

"I declare!" he exclaimed, "this little pamphlet 'Hints and Helps for the Sunday School' must have been printed on purpose for green fellows like me; and all for five cents! And this book here, 'Missions in the Sunday School,'—the woman who wrote that knew what she was about; why, it's worth its weight in gold—just jammed full of all sorts of ideas for running a missionary Sunday school! And this capital little paper, 'World-Wide,' we must have that in the Intermediate and Primary classes, sure; and here's something in your line, little woman"—Aunt Ruth had a class in the Primary Department—"lots of pictures with little stories tacked on—'Orient Picture Stories!' And look at this picture book! 'Up and Down in Bhamo Town.'"

With the assistance of Priscilla and Aunt Ruth, Uncle John made selections from his "marching directions"

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which imparted a distinct missionary flavor to the Sunday school session held on the following Sabbath. On the wall facing the pupils was a copy of the Great Commission lettered in red and blue. Below it was an enlarged page from the Missionary Prayer Calendar, wreathed in evergreen; this was Priscilla's idea, and Aunt Ruth had placed upon the desk a photograph of the missionary mentioned on the calendar page as the special subject of prayer for this particular Sabbath. On the walls in the classrooms and departments were also hung texts in which the words especially conveying the idea of God's plan for a world-wide kingdom were printed in capital letters, this being also the case with the Great Commission; as for example: "The field is the WORLD," "God so loved the WORLD that he gave his only begotten Son that WHOSOEVER believeth," etc., "Go ye into ALL THE WORLD and preach the Gospel to EVERY creature."

The opening hymn sung, Uncle John announced that the reading of the Scripture connected with the Sunday school lesson would be omitted. "For," he explained, "we're going to read it in our classes in a few moments, so that it's entirely unnecessary to make it a part of our opening exercises. To-day our Scripture lesson will be found right here on the wall; let us read it in concert and make those words in capitals talk a little louder than the others." And in a manner which satisfied even wide-awake Uncle John, the Great Commission was read.

And then Priscilla, in sweet and unaffected fashion, gave a brief talk about the missionary named on the Calendar page; this was followed by the pastor's prayer, in which special mention was made of this missionary and of his field. A missionary hymn closed these simple but effective exercises, which had occupied about fifteen minutes. Uncle John had wasted no time in public la-

mentation over past negligence, neither did he mention the word "missions"; he had introduced this new feature as the most natural thing in the world, and as such it had been received.

At the next teachers' meeting, plans were formed for making missions a permanent feature of the school life. The second Sabbath of each month was to be set apart as Missionary Sunday, when the opening and closing exercises were to be of a missionary character and the offerings to be devoted to denominational missionary work. The teachers were constituted a missionary committee, each in turn to have the charge of the exercises for Missionary Sundays, with the privilege of appointing sub-committees for details, as music, mite-boxes or envelopes, topics, maps, charts, literature, pictures, or any feature likely to promote interest. Four times a year an entire Sunday was to be given up to the consideration of missions, the pastor, or a missionary, or a missionary official to speak in the morning, and a concert or stereopticon talk for the evening exercises.

As for the exercises themselves, sometimes they were carried on by one or more classes, the manner of presenting the topic left to the members, and when this was the case there was sure to be no lack of variety spice. News from the field, or anecdotes from some missionary's life, with special music, would make up the program; now and then, the little folks would occupy the time, with sand-map exercises, or motion songs, and occasionally, as one of the greatest of treats, a letter from Priscilla, telling of her work on the field, would be read to the school. Incidentally, one of the most interesting features of the Sunday school session, whether on Missionary Sunday or not, were the terse interpretations of the Sunday school lessons from a missionary point of view, given by Uncle John.

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Then there were the missionary socials—how delightful they were! A Japanese fete, a Chinese supper, a curio evening, missionary tableaux, stories, the picnic meetings in the summer-time—these are only a few of the “Missionary Good Times” enjoyed by Uncle John’s Sunday school, and at all of which he “was a boy again,” a moving spirit in all the pleasure and profit of these occasions.

The annual Sunday school Christmas exercises—when the Intermediates gave “Helping Santa Claus,” was voted the “best ever.”

Even the graduation requirements were supplemented to harmonize with the new spirit which pervaded the school, for now the graduates from the departments must learn a Scripture verse or passage relating to missions—for the Intermediate grade, Romans x. 13, 14, 15; for the Primary, the Great Commission, and the like.

And the effect of all this upon the school? Just as always, obedience to the Master’s commands in this case, was followed by His blessing. The roll of members was much longer; the intellectual horizon became wider; the spiritual life grew deeper; and the church of which the school was a part was greatly strengthened and blessed. Surely this mission-loving school of the present will become a mission-loving church of the future.

